

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

<u>Project Name:</u> Cromwell Break Request	<u>Proposed Implementation Date:</u> February 2013
<u>Proponent:</u> Ronald W. Cromwell, P.O. Box 184, Scobey, MT 59263	
<u>Type and Purpose of Action:</u> State lessee, Ronald Cromwell, has requested to break 250.06 acres of expired CRP land on State lease #1600 and 280.0 acres of expired CRP land on State lease #4015. The CRP contracts for the referenced tracts expired on September 30, 2012. Mr. Cromwell wishes to now utilize the expired CRP acreage for small grain production.	
<u>Location:</u> 250.06 acres in Sections 2&3 of Twp. 37N –Rge. 47E and 280.0 acres in Section 14 of Twp. 37N – Rge. 47E	<u>County:</u> Daniels

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

<p>1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.</p>	<p>The proponent, Ronald Cromwell, submitted a break request in writing to the Glasgow Unit Office (GUO) of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The request will be reviewed per DNRC land breaking criteria for all lands other than native sod.</p> <p>MT FWP was solicited by the GUO for comment and responded on January 10th, 2013. FWP's comments regarding vegetative cover as it pertains to wildlife habitat are discussed in Section 7 of this checklist. FWP is generally opposed to breaking of CRP lands that provide substantial benefits to wildlife; however, FWP understands the DNRC and lessee's best interest may be to break up expired CRP land. If permission to break is granted, DNRC staff has promised FWP to meet them onsite to determine if any of the drainages on L# 1600 should be left in permanent cover because they are critical to the area's wildlife. DNRC staff would flag off areas determined to be highly critical to wildlife along with any drainage determined to be highly susceptible to water erosion at that time. FWP also provided information regarding cost share programs offered by FWP to entice lessees/landowners to enroll lands into CRP. This information will be passed along by the GUO to lessees inquiring about enrolling/re-enrolling State land into CRP.</p> <p>NRCS and FSA will be involved.</p>
<p>2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:</p>	<p>DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed.</p>
<p>3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:</p>	

	<p>Action Alternative: Grant the proponent permission to convert 530.06 acres of expired CRP from permanent cover to small grain production.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Deny the proponent permission to convert 530.06 acres of expired CRP from permanent cover to small grain production.</p>
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II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS N = Not Present or No Impact will occur. Y = Impacts may occur (explain below)
4.GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?	<p>Soils are primarily Williams - Zahill loam complexes and Zahill loam. These soils are considered class III and IV soil types and are well suited for farming. The soil types meet the DNRC's breaking criteria for lands other than native sod. Removing the permanent cover will make the soil more susceptible to erosion; however, the continuous cropping methods used by our lessee should minimize erosion. No unusual geologic features or fragile, compactable, or unstable soils are present.</p> <p>Action: Removing the permanent vegetation would increase the likelihood of soil erosion, but erosion is not anticipated to increase if proper farming techniques are implemented. No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics are anticipated. Lessee would be required to reseed all eroding areas to permanent cover if erosion becomes a problem in the future.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the geology or soil characteristics will occur.</p>
5.WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?	<p>Small grain crop production would utilize the soils available water similar to the tame grasses that are present.</p> <p>Action: The project is not anticipated to impact the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution of surface water.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the water quality, quantity, and/or distribution will occur.</p>
6.AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	<p>Action: No impacts to air quality are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to air quality will occur.</p>
7.VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	<p>FWP recommended a 100m buffer around drainages and seasonal wetlands. FWP identified drainages on L# 1600, located along the Canadian border, as a migration corridor and wintering ground for mule deer. DNRC staff would meet with the proponent and FWP to</p>

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	<p>flag off drainages highly susceptible to water erosion and/or determined to be critical wildlife habitat. No rare plants or cover types are present within the project area.</p> <p>Action: Vegetation cover would be altered from expiring CRP acreage (tame grass) to annually seeded cropland. No rare plants or cover types are present in the current stand of vegetation.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the vegetation cover, quantity, and/or quality will occur.</p>
<p>8.TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</p> <p>Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified 2 animal species of concern. The listed species are fish species that are dependent on small prairie rivers. The project area is not located near any small prairie rivers, but the small drainages on and near the project area eventually empty into small prairie rivers. No impacts to these minnow species would occur from proceeding with the proposed action. Wildlife in the area consists of whitetail deer, antelope, mule deer, upland game birds, song birds, migrating waterfowl, small mammals, amphibians, etc. The current stand of CRP grass is likely used for nesting habitat by bird species and as bedding, resting, and hiding habitat for the area's wildlife. Removing the CRP would displace the animals into the surrounding landscape. The annual production of small grains would add a food source to the area.</p> <p>Action: No substantial impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to terrestrial, avian, and/or aquatic life and habitats will occur.</p>
<p>9.UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?</p>	<p>A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program identified 2 animal species of concern. The listed species are fish species that are dependent on small prairie rivers. The project area is not located near any small prairie rivers, but the small drainages on and near the project area eventually empty into small prairie rivers. No wetlands are located within the project area.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources will occur.</p>
<p>10.HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>Action: The acreage proposed to be broken has been disturbed in the past and does not contain any historical, archaeological, and/or paleontological resources.</p>

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	No Action: No impacts to the areas historical, archeological, and/or paleontological resources will occur.
11.AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?	<p>The project area currently consists of a mixture of grazing lands, agricultural lands, and CRP lands. This project area is not near a prominent topographic feature, no excessive noise or light would be produced, and it is not visible from a populated or scenic area.</p> <p>Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the areas aesthetics will occur.</p>
12.DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?	<p>Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the demands of environmental resources such as land, water, air, and/or energy resources will occur.</p>
13.OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	<p>Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to studies, plans, and/or projects will occur.</p>

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

RESOURCE	[Y/N] POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	<p>Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to human health and/or safety risks will occur.</p>
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	<p>Action: No impacts to industrial and commercial activities are anticipated. Returning the expiring CRP acreage to agricultural production would result in increased small grain production.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to the industrial, commercial, and/or agricultural activities and production will occur.</p>
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	<p>Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.</p> <p>No Action: No impacts to quantity and distribution of employment will occur.</p>
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate	Action: The proposed action may increase tax revenue from the increased revenues generated from the lease

IV. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Grant permission to convert to agriculture land.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

No large impacts were identified in the writing of this EA.

27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:

☐ EIS ☐ More Detailed EA ☐ No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By: R. Hoyt Richards CLO Area Manager
Name Title

/s/ Date: February 1, 2013
Signature